

Gala honours female trailblazers

BY JANE SOUTHWARD

Hundreds of solicitors gathered at NSW Parliament on 26 November to mark the centenary of a change to the law to allow women in NSW to practise as solicitors and in politics.

The First 100 Years gala celebrated on 26 November capped off a year of events led by members of the legal profession to recognise the achievements of female lawyers who have pioneered changes to encourage women to practise law. The campaign has been supported by the Law Society of NSW and Women Lawyers Association of NSW throughout 2018, with a dedicated website at first100years.com.au, the commissioning of a portrait of Australia's first female Chief Justice Susan Kiefel AC, and the development of a video about women in law.

The initiative culminated in the unveiling of three photo mosaics of legal trailblazers, pictured above from left, Marie Byles, the first practising solicitor in NSW, former Justice Jane Mathews, the first woman appointed as a judge in NSW, and Ada Evans, Australia's first female law graduate.

The mosaics were created by Sydney artist and *LSJ* contributor Rocco Fazzari, using hundreds of photographs of Australian lawyers. They symbolise three important women in NSW legal history who have been a source of inspiration for many others following them. The photomosaics were presented as large-scale digital portraits and were sponsored by Allen & Overy, MinterEllison and Ashurst.

The idea for these legal photomosaics came to Rachel Scanlon, the founder of the First 100 Years NSW initiative, when she was viewing the 2017 Archibald Prize and saw the portrait of Dr John Valance, a former headmaster of Sydney Grammar School. That portrait comprised hundreds of tiny coloured blocks, each painted by a different schoolboy.

A new award from the Law Society of NSW was also launched at the gala, recognising a commitment to the Charter for the Advancement of Women in the Profession. The team from Clayton Utz won the award and the team from Coutts was highly commended. Former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick gave the keynote address, saying 35 years of working in the law had taught her the need of "finding that distinctive voice and then using it to challenge the status quo".

"As women lawyers we have all benefited from the activism and advocacy of those who have come before us," Broderick said.

"We have rights today as female lawyers because someone we will never know, most likely another female lawyer, advocated for us – advocated for our right to practice our craft, to work *and* care, to hold senior roles as lawyers, barristers, judges, to represent Australia globally.

"To all those who have come before me, many in the room tonight, to you who have laid the foundations for each of us, who have prepared our path, I say thank you."

First 100 Years founder Rachel Scanlon called on the profession to "work together to ensure a strong and equal future for all women in the legal profession by continuing to raise awareness about our history and by inspiring future generations of female lawyers".

Also on the First 100 Years steering committee are Amber Cerny, Catherine James, Ilana Orlevsky and Lucinda Bradshaw.